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Author(s): Kathleen Manukyan

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Kathleen Manukyan

From Maidens to Mugs: The Motif of the Mirror in the Works of Nikolai Gogol'

ABSTRACT: From Plato's times to our contemporary age, theorists have spoken of art as being a mirror of life and sometimes argued against the notion. In his nonfiction essays on art and literature, Gogol' was also fond of the metaphor. Due to the frequency with which mirrors appear in his work, Gogol''s oeuvre offers a unique opportunity for study of how the idiom of art-as-mirror transforms in the move from theoretical reflections to his fictional stories. Appealing to Meyer Abrams's claim that the mirror has become a "constitutive" metaphor, this article assumes that: a) the potential problems the metaphor introduces are fair game in general theorizing, and b) the questions introduced into the texts by Gogol''s fictional mirrors may also point toward problematic issues in his thought on art and development as an artist. The article surveys Gogol''s use of mirrors in his fiction and relates them to their theoretical counterparts. Clear patterns emerge that parallel the geographical and meta-literary subject matter of his work. Ultimately, the article reveals how Gogol''s evolving treatment of the mirror metaphor may offer insight into the sources of the author's "creative decline."

> Блаженны чистые сердцем, яко тии Бога узрят—как в чистом зеркале успокоенных вод, не возмущаемых ни песком, ни тиной, отражается чисто небесный свод, так и в зеркале чистого сердца, не возмущаемого страстями, уже нет ничего человеческого, и образ Божий в нем отражается один.
>
> Н.В. Гоголь, "Размышления о Божественной Литургии" (1847)
>
> And the same things appear bent and straight when seen in water or out of it, or concave and convex because sight is misled by colors; and every other similar sort of confusion is clearly present in our soul. It is because it exploits this weakness in our nature that illusionist painting is nothing short of sorcery…
>
> Plato's *Republic,* Book X[1]

INTRODUCTION

If you have ever spent a stretch of time as a houseguest in Russia, you may have learned to glance in a mirror upon reentering the home to pick up a forgotten item. If you fail to do this, you will be testing your luck during the journey. The

[1] Translated by C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004) 306.

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Russian custom is one of dozens of mirror-related traditions and superstitions throughout the world. The enduring fascination with mirrors in folkloric spheres and beyond is easily explained by the unique properties of this everyday object. Chief amongst these, of course, is its ability to produce a real-time image of a person. The mirror is a principal metaphor for both sinful vanity and truthful introspection. Another property, the ability to create illusions of space, lets us imagine demonic worlds on the other side of the mirror. And a final feature is the mirror's dichotomous relationship to "truth" in its image-making. We look to mirrors as the only source of reliable information about our physical selves when the words of others do not suffice. But what we see, the "mirror image," is in fact a reversed and two dimensional rendering of our three-dimensional selves. The simultaneity of exactitude and futility in the mirror image can be a powerful metaphor for the problem of self-knowledge. Common expressions like "smoke and mirrors" and "house of mirrors" attest that optical trickery has brought distortion, deception and confusion into the mirror's metaphorical domain alongside truth-telling.

The idiom that "art is a mirror" (which often, but not always, denotes imitation of reality, whether material or spiritual) is so common that Meyer Abrams selected the mirror as an "archetypal analogy" in his history of literary criticism *The Mirror and the Lamp.* Of such analogies he writes: "While many expository analogues, as conventional opinion proposes, are casual and illustrative, some few seem recurrent and, not illustrative, but *constitutive:* they yield the ground plan and essential structural elements of a literary theory, or of any theory."[2] When the analogy does become "constitutive" in a theory, then the various properties of the object of comparison, such as those of the mirror discussed above, become both relevant and problematic. As Abrams discusses, this was already the case in Plato's *Republic*, in which art, like shadows on the walls of Socrates's cave or the heavens reflected in a mirror, is said to be a deficient imitation of the more real world of Ideas. Reasoning by metaphor, it seems, can be as important to literary theory as metaphorical imagery is to literature.

In Gogol"s contemporary Romantic age, the trend was against viewing the mimetic function of art as deficient, even in cases when artist-theorists appealed to Plato's Ideal Forms, by means of romantic Neoplatonic readings of the dialogues. These looked toward Diotima of *Symposium,* who argues that *Eros* and the quest for immortality through creation result in the connection of Beauty to Goodness and Truth, thus promoting both creative art and physical matter to more elevated positions than those they occupied among the Platonists or the "original" Neoplatonists of Plotinus. In Abrams's schematic, then, the traditional "mirror" idiom is eventually combined with (and overtaken by) the romantic

[2] Meyer H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953) 31 (author's emphasis).

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emblematic analogy of the "lamp"—conveying the outflow of light and truth that the poet discovers through contemplation of higher truths and the imagination that enables him to perceive them. Abrams writes much of Shelley, who "like many of his contemporaries, reverses the aesthetic mirror in order to make it reflect the lamp of the mind," thus creating a "combination of Platonism and psychological empiricism, and of the mimetic and expressive point of view."[3] While scholars have noted Plato's relevance[4] for Gogol' for some time, Michal Oklot has recently produced with success a full interpretation of Gogol''s system of imagery of "matter" in view of this "strong current in the entire Romantic literature to which Gogol belongs"[5] (Neoplatonism). Here we consider, in effect, just one subset of Gogol''s "images of matter," but one of utmost significance to the author's relation to critical theory—mirrors and the images reflected in them.

This article is concerned with the literary and meta-literary function of mirrors in Gogol''s fiction. Before turning to the stories, though, a brief look at the writings of Gogol' as art critic clearly indicates the mode in which he preferred to invoke the mirror metaphor—namely, that of the pure reflector of truths. The writer remarks on the painting "The Last Day of Pompei" in an essay that shares that title in *Arabesques* (1835), saying that the artist Karl Briullov achieves the first works in Russia that "in their vividness, are accessible to anyone like a pure mirror of nature."[6] In the essay entitled "Finally, On the Essence of Russian Poetry and its Distinctive Features," published in *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends* (1847), one can read that there are two types of poets; the first possesses a "multifaceted, descriptive talent" and is destined to be a "true mirror and echo of life,"[7] and the other type is the poet endowed with "lyrical talent," who is to be at the forefront of the noblest of

[3] Abrams 130.

[4] Mikhail Weiskopf, "The Bird Troika and the Chariot of the Soul: Plato and Gogol," translated by Priscilla Meyer, in *Essays on Gogol: Logos and the Russian Word*, edited by Susanne Fusso and Priscilla Meyer (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1992) 126–142. The author cites studies of Gogol''s Platonism by Innokentii Annenskii, Sergei Shambinago, Vasilii Zen'kovskii, and Jesse Zeldin, but credits Vasilii Gippius for noticing the German Neoplatonism in "Woman." Vasilii Gippius, *Gogol'* (Leningrad: Mysl', 1924).

[5] Michal Oklot, *Phantasms of Matter in Gogol (and Gombrowicz)* (Urbana-Champaign: Dalkey, 2009).

[6] Nikolai Gogol', *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii (PSS) v 14 tomakh,* vol. 8 (Moskva: Izd-vo AN SSSR, 1937–1952) 113. "живостью, чистым зеркалом природы, доступны всякому." Translations of Gogol''s critical works are mine. Translations of his fiction are usually the most recent editions by Pevear and Volokhonsky when available and mine when not (in the quotations from "Sorochinsky Fair" and *Taras Bulba*). Original quotations are usually provided in the footnotes.

[7] Gogol', *PSS* 8: 390. "верным зеркалом и отголоском жизни."

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societal movements. The first type thus represents the mimetic artist who depicts what is (the mirror), and the second the "creative" artist who transforms and ennobles reality (the lamp). Gogol' relays that neither type of poet has been truly heard by the contemporary generation and, therefore, Russian poetry has neither been of great influence on society nor a "clear mirror of all our daily life."[8] Further in the essay, Gogol''s description of the contemporary Russian reaction to "our" poetry recalls the many instances in which his characters search for some vital information about their selves in the mirror of art and are bewildered at what they see reflected: "The matter is strange: though we ourselves have been the subject of our poetry, nonetheless we do not recognize ourselves in it. When a poet shows us our best sides, it seems to us exaggerated, and we are almost ready to disbelieve what Derzhavin[9] tells us about ourselves. When a writer displays our low sides, we again disbelieve, and it seems to us a caricature. It is just as if in both there is some kind of power of exaggeration, though in fact there is no exaggeration."[10]

Gogol' argues that poetry has been operating properly as that 'pure', 'true' and 'clear' mirror of life, as well as "lyrically," but society has failed to trust in art's ability to see more acutely than the naked eye, to show the kernels that are "almost unnoticeable to simple eyes."[11] Indeed, the metaphor of the mirror in Gogol''s works and elsewhere often coalesces, not surprisingly, with that of the lens. The lens allows access to truths by widening or narrowing our scope beyond that which is accessible to the unassisted physical body and its senses. Through the mirror we may inspect the self, but the lens might change the magnification, and, like the mirror, the lens as "constitutive" metaphor introduces questions of distortion. How trustworthy is the image presented? Do we possess the mental faculties to interpret an image of abnormal scope? How do we distinguish between distortion and creative transformation?

The quotations above, though not meant to elucidate yet a definitive (and certainly not consistent) Gogolian critical theory of art, do demonstrate that Gogol' returned to the mirror metaphor frequently in his critical essays from the earlier period of *Arabesques* to the final stages of his career in *Selected Passages*. Following Abrams example, then, this frequency allows us to

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[8] Gogol', *PSS* 8: 403. "ясным зеркалом всего нашего быта."

[9] Gogol' speaks of Derzhavin's odes in praise of Russia and the Tsar.

[10] Gogol', *PSS* 8: 403–404. "Дело странное: предметом нашей поэзии всё же были мы, но мы в ней не узнаем себя. Когда поэт показывает нам наши лучшие стороны, нам это кажется преувеличенным, и мы почти готовы не верить тому, что говорит нам о нас же Державин. Когда же выставляет писатель наши низкие стороны, мы опять не верим, и нам это кажется карика<турок>. Есть, точно, в том и другом как бы какая-то преувеличенная сила, хотя в самом деле преувеличенья нет."

[11] Gogol', *PSS* 8: 404. "почти неприметном для простых глаз."

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hypothesize a "constitutive analogy" for Gogol''s personal critical thought as we now turn to his fictional works.

Mentions of mirrors throughout Gogol''s oeuvre are noticeably common: over a dozen occur in the Dikan'ka tales; one in each of the stories of *Mirgorod*, except *Taras Bulba* whose two references to mirrors appear only in the 1842 revised edition; one or several in each of his stories set in Saint Petersburg such as *Arabesques's* "Nevsky Prospect" with two or "The Nose" with ten; some in each of his plays, including the fore-grounded epigraph to "The Inspector General"; five in the fragment "Rome"; and fifteen in *Dead Souls.* In light of the long history of the mirror idiom and its repeated use in Gogol''s nonfictional writings on art, in which they are always clear, true, and pure, the frequency with which mirrors appear in his fictional works is intriguing and offers an opportunity for investigation that is not possible in examining other writers who confine the metaphor to their critical work. The obvious task is to survey the corpus and determine whether the mirrors in these fictional worlds are indeed symbols of art and, if so, whether they are as clear, true, and pure reflectors in those worlds as they are in critical literature. In a further step, this study will trace how Gogol''s treatment of the mirror idiom in his texts evolved, noting where its path parallels some of the geographical settings and meta-aesthetic subjects in his texts.

Geographically, the analysis that follows moves from Gogol''s earliest successful stories in the Ukrainian countryside of Dikan'ka, to those set in the Russian Provinces, and ends in St. Petersburg, via many European stations, such as Rome. The properties of the mirrors that appear strongly correlate with their given locale. Arguing that this is not just a matter of authentic scene design, the article will focus on one more of Gogol''s essays from *Arabesques,* "Sculpture, Painting, and Music" to show how the teleological hierarchy of the arts laid out in this work corresponds to the functions of mirrors in each of the geographical settings. Finally, it will conclude with some thoughts about how the evolution of the mirror idiom in his work is illustrative of the author's frequently discussed "creative decline."

UKRAINIAN MAIDENS AND SCULPTURAL BEAUTY

Four of the stories in *Evenings on a Farm near Dikan'ka* make mention of mirrors: "Sorochinsky Fair" and "May Night" from part one and "Christmas Eve" and "A Terrible Vengeance" from part two. Gogol' inserts mirrors into these works in two manners: he describes rivers as mirrors or mirror-like, and he has female characters gaze at their own reflections. The first instance occurs in the last sentence of the broad, lyrical opening paragraph of "Sorochinsky Fair" that describes the Ukrainian landscape: "the sky, its pure mirror—the river in a

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green, proudly uplifted frame… the Ukrainian summer is full of voluptuousness and bliss."[12]

After this, the narrator describes the fair and the arrival of the beautiful, dark-browed Paraska and her parents. Gogol' creates a close association in the opening chapter between the maiden and the river Psel, as first indicated by the transition from the description of the stepmother's devilish face, which is "…so wild, that everyone immediately hurried to divert their disturbed gaze to the cheery little face of the daughter." The next paragraph begins: "The Psel already began to open up before the eyes of our travelers; from far off blew a coolness, which seemed more perceptible after the exhausting, destructive heat."[13] This seemingly abrupt change in subject is not merely a case of the idiosyncrasy of the sometimes rambling and lyrically inconsistent narrator. A turn from the wild red face of the stepmother to the "cheery little face" is equated with the return from the day's heat to the river's refreshing coolness. The next paragraph's comparison of the river to a beautiful woman at a mirror confirms this:

> Through the dark and light green leaves, carelessly strewn about the meadow of birch and poplar, fiery, cold sparks began to sparkle, and the river-beauty dazzlingly exposed its silver breast, upon which green curls of the trees carelessly fell. Willful, like she in those delightful hours, when the faithful mirror so enviously contains her brow, full of pride and of blinding radiance, her lily shoulders and her marble neck, shaded with dark waves fallen from her blond head, when with disdain she tosses aside her frills to replace them with others and there is no end to her caprices—almost every year she changes her surroundings, choosing a new path for herself and surrounding herself with new, diverse terrain.[14]

This highly personified description is followed by a return to the arriving *krasavitsa* atop the wagon, who ponders the view until admiring shouts from the village boys interrupt. This river, as a "willful woman," recalls two other

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[12] Gogol', *PSS* 1: 111–112. "небо, его чистое зеркало—река в зеленых, гордо поднятых рамах... как полно сладострастия и неги малороссийское лето!"

[13] Gogol', *PSS* 1: 113. "…столь дикое, что каждый тотчас спешил перенести встревоженный взгляд свой на веселенькое личико дочки." Then "Глазам наших путешественников начал уже открываться Псёл; издали уже веяло прохладою, которая казалась ощутительнее после томительного, разрушающего жара."

[14] Gogol', *PSS* 1: 113. "Сквозь темно- и светло-зеленые листья небрежно раскиданных по лугу осокоров, берез и тополей засверкали огненные, одетые холодом искры, и река-красавица блистательно обнажила серебряную грудь свою, на которую роскошно падали зеленые кудри дерев. Своенравная, как она в те упоительные часы, когда верное зеркало так завидно заключает в себе ее полное гордости и ослепительного блеска чело, лилейные плечи и мраморную шею, осененную темною, упавшею с русой головы, волною, когда с презрением кидает одни украшения, чтобы заменить их другими, и капризам ее конца нет—она почти каждый год переменяла свои окрестности, выбирая себе новый путь и окружая себя новыми, разнообразными ландшафтами."

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striking instances of feminine personification in Gogol''s essays, both connected with Greek antiquity. In the essay from *Arabesques*, entitled "Sculpture, Painting, and Music" and dated 1831, these three arts are called three sisters who have been sent in succession to adorn the world. The eldest of the three is sculpture, who represents the proud and passionate, though less spiritual, ideas of the pagan world of antiquity. The greatest idea she represents is physical beauty. Therefore, like the River Psel, sculpture is depicted as a young female beauty at the mirror:

> She is beautiful, ephemeral, like a beauty, having glanced in the mirror and, seeing her reflection, laughed, and already running away, attracting with triumph a crowd of proud youths behind her. She is charming, like life, like the world, like sensual beauty, for which she serves as an altar. She was born together with the clearly formed pagan world, she expressed it—and died together with it. In vain they wanted to embody in her the high manifestations of Christianity, she was as removed from it as the pagan faith itself was.[15]

This is a beauty for whom a glance in the mirror evokes neither introspection nor contemplation of eternity. Her mood is always celebratory and carefree as she brings purely aesthetic pleasure to herself and those around her. Calling her vain is futile because she has no knowledge of the sin of pride and, like the sun or river, is only receiving her due praise; indeed, she "serves as an altar." This is akin to the eternal feminine figure, the woman of infallible, heavenly beauty who is the subject of Gogol''s Platonic dialogue "Woman," on which he worked concurrently with the Dikan'ka tales. In this Gogolian-Platonic dialogue, the philosopher discusses the adoration of woman:

> What is woman?—The language of gods! We wonder at the meek, light brow of man; but we do not see the semblance of the gods in it: we see in it woman, we wonder at the woman in it and only in her we wonder at the gods. She is poetry! She is thought, and we are only her embodiment in reality... Why does the artist with such insatiable desire strive to turn his immortal idea into crude material, having subjugated it to our everyday feelings? Because he is ruled by one high feeling—to express the divine in material itself, to make accessible to people at least a part of the endless world of his soul, to embody woman in man.[16]

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[15] Gogol', *PSS* 8: 10. "Она прекрасна, мгновенна, как красавица, глянувшая в зеркало, усмехнувшаяся, видя свое изображение, и уже бегущая, влача с торжеством за собою толпу гордых юношей. Она очаровательна, как жизнь, как мир, как чувственная красота, которой она служит алтарем. Она родилась вместе с языческим, ясно образовавшимся миром, выразила его—и умерла вместе с ним. Напрасно хотели изобразить ею высокие явления христианства, она так же отделялась от него, как самая языческая вера."

[16] Gogol', *PSS* 8: 145–146. "Что женщина?—Язык богов! Мы дивимся кроткому, светлому челу мужа; но не подобие богов созерцаем в нем: мы видим в нем женщину, мы дивимся в нем женщине и в ней только уже дивимся богам. Она

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These statements evoke romantic Neoplatonism, in which woman is a part of a special circle consisting of herself, nature, and God in the semi-pantheistic settings of Ancient Greece and rural Ukraine.[17] As an idea and as an aesthetic-divine creation, Woman exists in perfection. It is when the human artist makes pretensions to either depict or contemplate her that problems arise; he cannot translate the "language of the gods" to human speech. Gogol''s Plato calls woman "poetry," but the real work of poets rarely captures this poetry, and Plato will go on to speak of the "endless, boundless, fleshless idea of an artist" ("*beskonechnaia, bezgranichnaia, besplotnaia ideia khudozhnika*"), which will continue to seek the true paths of incarnation, free from coarse materiality.[18] Gogol''s linguistic decisions in the phrase above suggest how crucial the artist-as-man's absence is to the artist-as-idea. If we return to Dikan'ka, another case of a river-mirror also supports this.

In chapter ten of "The Terrible Vengeance," the splendor of the Dniepr in good weather is described at length as an endless blue mirror:

> ...and you fancy he is all molded of glass, as if a blue mirror roadway, of boundless width, of endless length, hovers and meanders over the green world. It is a delight then for the hot sun to look down from on high and plunge its rays into the chill of the glassy waters and for the coastal forests to be brightly reflected in them. Green-curled! they crowd to the waters together with the wildflowers and, bending down, gaze into them and cannot have enough of it, enough of admiring their own bright image, and they smile to it and greet it, nodding their branches. But into the middle

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поэзия! Она мысль, а мы только воплощение ее в действительности... Отчего же художник с таким несытым желанием стремится превратить бессмертную идею свою в грубое вещество, покорив его обыкновенным нашим чувствам? Оттого, что им управляет одно высокое чувство—выразить божество в самом веществе, сделать доступною людям хотя бы часть бесконечного мира души своей, воплотить в мужчине женщину."

[17] If at first the idealizing of buxom Ukrainian beauties seems at odds with other-worldly Platonic Ideas, one must remember that Gogol''s dialogue is more faithful to his own reading of Plato through the lens of the romantic ideas, which, as mentioned above, were inspired as much or more by Diotima and the Socrates of *Symposium* than by Socrates of *Republic*. Indeed, such readings are so common that Simon Blackburn has called them "The Poetic Interpretation" (in contrast to the religious and scientific interpretations) in his volume on *Republic*: "the initial beauty of the individual is never left behind. Such beauty is itself divine bounty... This is the Plato that is most attractive to artists and creators. The idea is that to look on things with real love is already to discern immortal qualities in them—qualities of beauty, truth, grace or harmony, that can in principle be manifested anywhere in space or time and are in that sense timeless." According to Blackburn, the interpretation of Platonic Ideas that most appeals to artists is therefore "not now other-worldly, but this-worldly, only this world appreciated as it should be, when the banquet of the senses is enlarged with imagination and insight." Simon Blackburn, *Plato's Republic: A Biography* (New York: Atlantic, 2006) 113.

[18] Gogol', *PSS* 8: 146.

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> of the Dnieper they dare not look: no one except the sun and the blue sky looks there.[19]

Here the forest and flowers clearly recall the *krasavitsa* preening in front of the mirror. Interestingly, the center of the river-mirror is reserved for just the god-like sun and sky, and we find that there may be a more elite realm which excludes such perfectly beautiful creations as flowers and beautiful women. Lest this textual moment seem just a function of the physical fact that small flowers indeed cannot be reflected in the center of a body of water no matter how far they might lean, a few sentences later we read: "Wondrous is the Dnieper, too, on a warm summer night, when everything falls asleep—man, beast, and bird—and God alone grandly surveys heaven and earth and grandly shakes his robes. Stars pour from his robes. Stars burn and shine over the world, and all are reflected at once in the Dnieper. All of them the Dnieper holds in his dark bosom."[20]

While the colourful and unsteady narration of the *Evenings* poses a variety of issues of scholarly concern, this excerpt seems to be one of the more profound, or at least revealing, utterances of the unreliable narrator. Throughout the Dikan'ka stories, the narrator describes settings from unlikely vantage points, but in this case he unabashedly describes the view of God himself. He even underscores the improbability of this circumstance by emphasizing that all have gone to sleep—man, beast, bird, and presumably our narrator. While, like the famous falling tree in the forest, this might lead us to any number of metaphysical questions, we will instead just turn to the observations of the Dnieper's respective *krasavitsa*, Katerina. This depiction of the Dnieper occurs almost immediately after Katerina, having learned of Danilo's death, cries out "I do not need my beauty any longer!" ("*Mne ne nuzhna bol'she krasota moia!*") Taken together, these moments in the text demonstrate how, to borrow Abrams's "co-ordinates" of critical theory, the expressive (author) and

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[19] Nikolai Gogol, *The Collected Tales of Nikolai Gogol,* translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage, 1998) 90; *PSS* 1: 268. ". . .будто весь вылит он из стекла, и будто голубая зеркальная дорога, без меры в ширину, без конца в длину, реет и вьется по зеленому миру. Любо тогда и жаркому солнцу оглядеться с вышины и погрузить лучи в холод стеклянных вод, и прибережным лесам ярко отсветиться в водах. Зеленокудрые! они толпятся вместе с полевыми цветами к водам, и наклонившись, глядят в них и не наглядятся, и не налюбуются светлым своим зраком, и усмехаются к нему, и приветствуют его, кивая ветвями. В середину же Днепра они не смеют глянуть: никто, кроме солнца и голубого неба, не глядит в него."

[20] Gogol', *PSS* 1: 268. "Чуден Днепр и при теплой летней ночи, когда всё засыпает, и человек, и зверь, и птица; а бог один величаво озирает небо и землю, и величаво сотрясает ризу. От ризы сыплются звезды. Звезды горят и светят над миром, и все разом отдаются в Днепре. Всех их держит Днепр в темном лоне своем."

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pragmatic (audience) prerogatives encroach upon the mimetic function of the "clear, pure, and true" mirror. The often folksy narrator's paradoxical ascension to omniscience highlights the pretensions of his position: he presumes divine knowledge in order to offer the reader an otherwise inaccessible glimpse of the innate beauty of creation. Katerina, though a part of that creation, sees no value in her beauty without a consumer of its delights.

Mikhail Weiskopf has noted a divergence in "Woman" that reflects the inevitable expressive and pragmatic questions that are relevant not only to the given picture of God and his creation at the mirror, but also to Gogol''s overall inquiry into art: "...the Sophiological image of God-the-artist even seems to bifurcate, becoming the artist himself and his logos ("the language of the Gods") or Wisdom-the female "idea," attained by the contemplative visionary."[21] Indeed, considering more of our encounters with mirrors, there are several instances in which Gogol' depicts a "contemplative visionary" watching a beautiful woman watching herself in the mirror. Poprishchin's Sophie and Piskarev's prostitute constitute a special case of women observing themselves in mirrors and it will be taken up later in the article. But in Dikan'ka the obvious example is the blacksmith's beloved Oksana from "The Night Before Christmas:" "'A wonderful girl!' the blacksmith, who had quietly come in, whispered, 'and so little boasting! She's been standing for an hour looking in the mirror and hasn't had enough, and she even praises herself aloud!'"[22] The blacksmith (and icon painter) Vakula, in his piety, his painting and his recognition of his beloved's vanity above, already bears a connection to the second, Christian "sister" in the hierarchy of Gogol''s essay—that of painting. As this will be developed in the next section, here we turn our attention to the downfall of the first sister, which is caused by the encroachment of expressive and pragmatic factors upon the mimetic in her functioning as work of art; put more simply, the demands of author and audience threaten her artistic self-sufficiency.

The leading ladies in these stories, as God's masterpieces but also as accessible potential lovers and wives to the male artists, create a link between the divine concept of creativity and the real materials necessary to achieve it on Earth. Just as the sexual parallel to this requires a moral fall, it seems that the artistic crossing over from divine to material through woman also brings the devil into play. Hence the vain Oksana marvels that her black braids "twist and wrap" around her head like "long snakes" which might frighten one.[23] Julian Graffy, in noting the prevalence of mirrors in Gogol''s St. Petersburg, remarks

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[21] Weiskopf 128.

[22] Gogol, *Collected Tales* 25–26; *PSS* 1: 207. "'Чудная девка!' прошептал вошедший тихо кузнец: 'и хвастовства у нее мало! С час стоит, глядясь в зеркало, и не наглядится, и еще хвалит себя вслух!'"

[23] Gogol', *PSS* 1: 207.

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that this "demonic invention," helps make the city the ultimate "realm of the demonic" largely because of its role as an enabler to the pervasive narcissism of the Petersburg characters.[24] In Dikan'ka however, perhaps narcissism is only a symptomatic demon (in this case to be chased away possibly by pending motherhood in which vanity and egocentricity are dissolved). A more central conjurer of devils may be the artistic mind that is striving, Faust-like, to bridge the gulf separating the divine and the earthly.

The divide between these two realms is exemplified by the colours framing the various mirrors in Dikan'ka.[25] The two most prominent colours are those with which the happily wedded Vakula paints his home and the church at the end of "Christmas Eve": green and red. The river Psel of Sorochintsy was a mirror in a "proudly lifted green frame," but in the final chapter of that story, Paraska (whose preening, like Oksana's, is also secretly observed, in this case by her father) contemplates her upcoming marriage by gazing at herself in a little mirror covered with red paper that she bought at the fair. Her father watches her as, holding this mirror, she sings her favourite song about enticing a "black-browed sweetheart" and a "green periwinkle." The song could be interpreted as a deceptively beguiling double of the "wedding song" used as the epigraph to the chapter, which tells the "little mother" to put on her "red boots" and silence her enemies. In this scene the dancing Paraska even clicks the spurs on her shoes, in accordance with a line from the epigraph. Here also, an association between the nearly married Paraska and her domineering stepmother forms as the girl tries on her stepmother's cap and even says to herself, "Stepmother does everything that comes to her mind. Really can't I also do everything that comes to mind?"[26] The act of imagining herself as wife introduces the devilish red into her persona. Earlier, when the family arrives at the fair, the introduction of the stepmother suggests the she also was once "green" like Paraska before red took over: "Unruly wife... But we forget that she

[24] Julian Graffy, "The Devil is in the Detail: Demonic Features of Gogol's Petersburg," in *Russian Literature and its Demons,* edited by Pamela Davidson (New York: Berghahn, 2000) 241–278, 266.

[25] The descriptions of frames of mirrors, pictures and icons in Gogol''s works have patterns that seem to follow a parallel trajectory to the mirrors themselves. The green frames of Dikan'ka's river will be replaced in the provinces with shabby gilt ones (see next section). Oklot notices the latter of these and interprets it within the context of his reading of Gogol': "Another typical motif of this Gogolian anti-place—already familiar to us in 'The Portrait' and *Dead Souls* is the frame whose gilt has peeled off or even been 'completely tarnished', an effect nominated by the present text as a figure for the incursion of excessive materiality upon the center/idea." Oklot 189.

[26] Gogol', *PSS* 1: 133. "Мачеха делает всё, что ей ни вздумается; разве и я не могу делать того, что мне вздумается?"

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also was sitting here atop the cart in a smart green woolen jacket, on which were sewn, as if on ermine, tassels of only red color…"[27]

"Sorochinsky Fair" ends on a darker note than one would expect after a final wedding of true lovers. There is sadness in Paraska's transformation from representative of the boundless idea of feminine beauty to bounded village wife, and the description of the wedding dances emphasizes the indifference and lifelessness of the elderly village women, whose "unyielding joylessness and gloom," as Iurii Mann has argued, is an "ominous contrast" to the dance prior to their entrance.[28] The narrator pans up from the scene and finishes the story by comparing this feeling of a transitory bloom and wilt to the final strains of music: "Is it not thus that joy, a beautiful and transient guest, flies from us, and in vain does the lonely sound think to express joy? In its own echo it hears already sadness and waste and madly heeds it."[29]

Music was the third and final of the three sisters in the essay "Sculpture, Painting, and Art," and Gogol' ends that work with a similarly timorous thought: "But to our young and infirm age he sent imperious music to swiftly turn us to him. But if music leaves us, then what will happen to our world?"[30] In noting a second "oddity" (the first being the old women's entrance into the dance) in the final scene of "Sorochinsky Fair," Mann points out the sudden appearance of a visible narrator in the phrase, "a strange, inexplicable feeling would overwhelm the spectator," and that because of the narrator's non-participation in the celebration, we read a sad sense of abandonment.[31] In this, according to Mann, we see the suggestions of the deeper and more spiritual strain of Gogol''s art (in contrast to what he calls the "imitative" side). For the present study, it is interesting that such suggestions coincide with distant echoes of music. As we have seen in Gogol''s essay, art's entrance into the contemporary age, first

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[27] Gogol', *PSS* 1: 113. "Неугомонная супруга... Но мы и позабыли, что и она тут же сидела на высоте воза в нарядной шерстяной зеленой кофте, по которой, будто по горностаевому меху, нашиты были хвостики красного только цвета…"

[28] Iurii Mann, *Poetika Gogolia* (Moskva: Khudozh. lit., 1978) 13. Translation mine. Mann argues in this section of the book against Bakhtin's interpretation of the old women's dancing as "typically carnival," saying they are marionette-like, imitating dance, and not participating in the circle of life, as opposed to being "pregnant with death." My reading of the scene is closer to Mann's, as the scene is ultimately too ominous to be produced by the good-natured spooks of carnival.

[29] Gogol', *PSS* 1: 136. "Не так ли и радость, прекрасная и непостоянная гостья, улетает от нас, и напрасно одинокий звук думает выразить веселье? В собственном эхе слышит уже он грусть и пустыню и дико внемлет ему."

[30] Gogol', *PSS* 8: 13. "Но в наш юный и дряхлый век ниспослал он могущественную музыку, стремительно обращать нас к нему. Но если и музыка нас оставит, что будет тогда с нашим миром?"

[31] Mann 14.

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through the form of painting, then through that of music, increases both its spiritual possibilities and its elusiveness for minds unprepared for it.

THE DUSTY PROVINCES VERSUS CHRISTIAN PAINTING

Thus far, the mirror's potential to distort has not been of great concern in the discussion of the Dikan'ka tales. However, a final example of a mirror-like body of water—the pond in "May Night"—is largely concerned with dreams and illusion. The one example in which the word "mirror" is used to describe the pond, shortly before the appearance of the drowned maiden, refers to the "sound of a swamp bird that has thrust its slippery nose in the wide watery mirror" ("*gudenie bolotnoi ptitsy, udariavshei skol'zkim nosom svoim v shirokoe vodnoe zerkalo*").[32] The choice of "nose" ("*nos*") rather than "beak" ("*kliuv*") is suspicious considering Gogol''s well-known interest in noses, especially his own. But the phrase seems a clear reference to the author when we recall the pun on the author's name as the *gogol'* or golden-eyed duck at the end of *Taras Bulba.* The resulting, albeit vague, allusion is one of Gogol' rippling the water to produce the image he wishes.

Taras Bulba differs in many basic respects from the other works of the *Mirgorod* cycle, including its setting and the way it makes reference to mirrors. The example discussed already seems a throw-back to the river-mirrors of Dikan'ka, as the "proud gogol'" ("*gordyi gogol'*") rushes along the Dniestr, which sparkles like a "river-mirror" ("*rechnoe-zerkalo*"). The second instance recalls Gogol''s use of the mirror metaphor in his essays, for it indicates clear, honest and heartfelt expression but also refers back to the sculptural eternal feminine in the statuesque figure of the Polish girl. After coming to her inside the fortress, Andrii praises her with all the loyalty and superlatives that Gogol''s Plato urged in "Woman." She listens "to the open, heartfelt speech, in which was reflected, as if in a mirror, a young heart full of strength."[33] However, as a Cossack, Andrii's "pagan" devotion to physical beauty at the cost of betraying his Orthodox faith, is a sin. Even the Polish girl senses this, "as if having suddenly felt the bite of a venomous reptile."[34]

If *Taras Bulba* is read as a life of a Christian martyr (which the crucifixion imagery suggests), then Andrii's death is the necessary demise of pagan idol-worship (and its associated art of sculpture). The other stories of *Mirgorod* show the heirs to this legacy and a new sort of mirror—a rather grimy one. The new kind of mirror is most vividly described as an item in Pulkheria Ivanovna's

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[32] Gogol', *PSS* 1: 175.

[33] Gogol', *PSS* 2: 103. "...открытую сердечную речь, в которой, как в зеркале, отражалась молодая, полная сил душа."

[34] Gogol', *PSS* 2: 104. "как бы внезапно почувствовав какое укушение ядовитого гада."

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room in "Old-World Landowners:" "Triangular tables in the corners, a rectangular one in front of the sofa and a mirror in a narrow gilt frame with carved leaves, which flies had covered with black specks, a rug in front of the sofa with birds looking like flowers and flowers looking like birds—these are about all the furnishings in the unpretentious house where my old couple lived."[35] The carpet is also notable in this description because of its obvious failure at depicting nature accurately. Earlier in the description of the house's interior we learn that the couple has several portraits on the wall that have been forgotten and specked with flies. The treatment of pictures, which Gogol' emphasizes in the stories, is relevant to the theme of mirrors, for as Abrams puts it, a picture "while itself a work of art, was a useful adjunct to the mirror for clarifying the less obvious mimetic quality of an art like poetry."[36]

In "Vii," the "Philosopher," Khoma Brut, must look into a mirror that is spattered with flies to see the "truth" ("*istina*") of the others' words (after they tell him that he has gone half gray). Like the landowners' golden frame engraved with a leaf pattern, garlands of flowers surround this "three-cornered piece of mirror" ("*treugol'nyi kusok zerkala*"). In the religious and slow-witted Korobochka's home in *Dead Souls,* all that Chichikov initially observes in the room in which he stays are "pictures with some kind of birds" ("*kartiny s kakimi-to ptitsami*"), mirrors with dark frames of rolled-up leaves, and a clock with flowers painted on it.

Continuing to conjecture that the evolving representations of mirrors in Gogol''s work (i.e., the patterns detected more than any one individual example) are to some degree analogies for art, we see that in updating to the provincial setting, art's "first sister" of sculpture has been left behind. According to the essay, the second sister of painting should follow. Like Pulkheria's mirror, this Christian art is framed in gold, as Gogol''s description of the art of painting indicates:

> The long galleries thus gleam, as if in a nebulous fog, where out of the antique gilt frame you [the painting] manifest yourself lively and dark from ruthless time, and before you stands a speechless observer with his arms crossed; and on his face is no longer pleasure, his gaze breathes with a pleasure unearthly. You were not an expression of the life of any nation; no, you were higher: you were the expression of all that belongs to the sacred Christian world.[37]

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[35] Gogol, *Collected Tales* 137; *PSS* 2: 18. "Трехугольные столики по углам, четырехугольные перед диваном и зеркалом в тоненьких золотых рамах, выточенных листьями, которых мухи усеяли черными точками, ковер перед диваном с птицами, похожими на цветы, и цветами, похожими на птиц,—вот всё почти убранство невзыскательного домика, где жили мои старики."

[36] Abrams 33.

[37] Gogol', *PSS* 8: 11. "Вот мелькают, как в облачном тумане, длинные галереи, где из старинных позолоченных рам выказываешь ты себя живую и темную от

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Clearly, the fly-covered mirrors of the *Mirgorod* type do not shine like the feminine painting ("*zhivopis'*") of the essay, nor do the carpet and the pictures that imitate nature so poorly. Is this because of the failings of the new art per se, though? If art is a "true" mirror then it should show an honest depiction of the spectator who cares to look into it. The state of disrepair of the provincial mirrors doubles that of the characters. So instead of the statuesque *krasavitsy* of Dikan'ka, in the provinces we find disfigured specimens like Agafia Fedosovna of the story of the "Two Ivans" whose tub-like figure makes it as hard to find her waist as it is to "see one's own nose without a mirror."[38]

But having lost sculpture, the provincials clearly still do not take in painting with the described "unearthly pleasure." Sincere interest in art on the characters' part will have to wait until the St. Petersburg tales. The inability to see oneself and the disinterest in doing so is one of the major themes of Gogol''s stories set in the provinces. Even the "human mirrors" of Chichikov and Khlestakov ("The Inspector General"), as they have so often been described,[39] can scarcely force the provincials to really see their own reflection. The cast of characters of the provinces, though ostensibly Christian (and certainly more Orthodox than those of Dikan'ka) generally lack any artist or "contemplative visionary" such as we saw in Vakula the Blacksmith, and so, paradoxically, having theoretical access to the next "sister" are themselves too talentless (and in many cases downright sinful) to receive her.[40]

неумолимого времени, и перед тобою стоит, сложивши накрест руки, безмолвный зритель; и уже нет в его лице наслаждения, взор его дышит наслаждением не здешним. Ты не была выражением жизни какой-нибудь нации; нет, ты была выше: ты была выражением всего того, что имеет таинственно-высокий мир христианский."

[38] Gogol', *PSS* 2: 241.

[39] Here I refer to the two heroes' ability to mimic the characteristics of the company around them (usually to their personal advantage), which is commonly remarked upon. Also oft-noted, however, is the question of their functioning as a mirror of the author himself. Merezhkovsky postulates on these issues in his classic essay, at one point comparing the heroes to artists: "Something resembling this primordial, natural lie or mimicry of hypocrisy has been lodged in Khlestakov by nature... Khlestakov's lying has something in common with the artist's power of invention... His is a disinterested lie; it is lying for lying's sake, art for art's sake..." (64) and later, "Here the truth and power of laughter suddenly betrayed Gogol: he took pity on himself in the image of Chichikov. There was something in Chichikov's 'earthly realism' that Gogol had not overcome in himself." (99) Quoted from Dmitri Merezhkovsky, "Gogol and the Devil," in *Gogol from the Twentieth Century,* translated and edited by Robert Maguire (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) 55–102.

[40] Of note are the particular problems that Pulkheria Ivanovna poses to this pattern, however. She is exceptional in many ways, primarily by her name that means "beautiful" and her loving behaviour. In addition, this story is actually set in Ukraine and there is a curious musical scene about the "singing doors" that follows the description of her room.

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THE GLITTERING CITY AND EVASIVE MUSIC

The city-dwellers of Gogol''s St. Petersburg stories, however, seem to have mirrors at their disposal and the will to look in them, but nonetheless encounter artistic failures as frequently as the provincials. They frequently check their own appearances (as in "The Nose"), watch others preen (as in "Nevsky Prospect") and suggest that others take a look in the mirror for a dose of reality (as in "Diary of a Madman" and the play "Marriage"). When characters find a deficient image in the mirrors of the city, however, they cannot blame the flies. The famous epigraph to "The Inspector General," then, reads as a rejoinder to Podkolesin's ("Marriage") attachment to his favourite mirror because "those other mirrors" show the face wrong and make one look older. In an article on the disfigured face in Gogol''s work, Sergei Bochkarev remarks, "The deformation of the face appears as an unmotivated fundamental attribute of the Gogolian world which arises both from the objective state of the world and the Gogolian person and from the author's subjective view of them. Both the view and the world, in their unique interconnection, are the source of this unusual and challenging depiction of humanity."[41]

The range of interactions with the (comparatively) clean mirrors of St. Petersburg seems to confirm that statement. In the story of the artist corrupted by money, "The Portrait," Chartkov moves into an apartment on Nevsky Prospect with mirrors and plate-glass windows. In his elegant new clothes he, "like a child," begins to continuously examine his appearance. Gogol' especially emphasizes the expensive *lorgnette*, which Chartkov "accidentally" ("*nechaianno*") buys and uses to watch passersby as he promenades about the street. Both these optical devices, the mirror and *lorgnette*, indicate the emptiness of his newly aristocratic life. His shiny new surroundings are the equivalent Paris of Gogol''s "Rome." The city's buildings made of glittering "mirrored glass" initially seem "*una cosa divina,*" but ultimately induce yawns in the Italian artist.[42] The over-civilized citizens of Chartkov's aristocratic St.

As in the final dance of "Sorochinsky Fair," as the description of the doors' "singing voices" comes to an end, the direct, wistful voice of the narrator returns (after a long stretch of third person narration): "If I happen to hear the occasional creaking of a door, it immediately smells of the village to me... and the distant river with his trills, of the fright and rustling of the branches... and, God, what a long string of memories comes to me then!" Gogol, *Collected Tales* 136.

[41] Sergei Bocharov, "Around 'The Nose'," translated by Susanne Fusso, in *Essays on Gogol: Logos and the Russian Word* 25.

[42] Robert Maguire has discovered the mirror motif to be associated with foreignness in "The Portrait" and "Diary of a Madman." This is certainly confirmed by the frequent mentions of mirrored glass in the description of Paris in "Rome." In the same section, he also confirms the association of mirrors and painting: "Mirrors of course glitter and sparkle, and in that sense extend the imagery of rapid movement and light. Painting is almost immediately invoked and associated with mirrors..." Robert A. Maguire, *Exploring Gogol* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994) 151.

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Petersburg, *lorgnettes* in hand, are highly sensitive to their own and their neighbours' physical flaws, but do not expect their commissioned portraits to reflect them. Their response to the "second sister" is not one of a "higher" Christian gratification at truthfulness, but simply one of ordinary, vain pleasure, and, from the pragmatic perspective, they thereby reduce her to the level of sculpture or even lower.

A missing nose, on the other hand, is a flaw too conspicuous to ignore. Kovalev, understandably, is the most mirror-obsessed character in all of Gogol''s work and, unlike Podkolesin, for him any reflector will do. The shocked Kovalev looks in the mirror five times to confirm that his nose is really missing, then, after it returns to its place, he looks five more times to ensure it has not run off again. The story of "The Nose," in its absurdity, offers a curious reversal of the moment in "The Portrait" when Chartkov ignores his aristocratic model's pimple: the return of his pimple is just what Kovalev seeks. If there is a moral to the strange and interpretively difficult story, then it is as ephemeral as the third "sister," music, since the story of this dream ("*son*") is ultimately passed off by the narrator as just one of those strange incidents that occur and the protagonist, at any rate, returns to the same lifestyle that he had in the beginning of the story. What has been accomplished by forcing this Petersburger to really see himself? Nothing.

Yet in the St. Petersburg stories, the encounters with mirrors have one common denominator that unites them and distinguishes them from the prior cycles dealt with above: whereas the mirrors of Dikan'ka represent art in an ideal (and rather isolated) state, and the dusty mirrors of the provinces represent indifference, those of the city provide for a complex intermingling of the mimetic, expressive, and pragmatic functions as characters seek out and surround themselves with mirrors and search to find, then express themselves in manners ranging from the sincere to the calculating to the delusional.[43] Gogol' gives us two St. Petersburg women who provide some insight into the pitfalls of city corruption, where beauty has lost touch with the Ideal Form. Back in Dikan'ka, in stories which ended in weddings, unrequited love remained an underdeveloped topic. However, it is inescapable reality for both Poprishchin in "Diary of a Madman" and the artist Piskarev in "Nevsky Prospect." According to the madman's account, Poprishchin sneaks into Sophie's room where she is sitting in front of a mirror, and then tells her that they should be together, despite

[43] In "The Overcoat," for instance, a range of motivations for dressing up, putting on airs, and so forth seems to be displayed between Akakii Akakevich and the "important person" (who practices lines in front of a mirror), but they may ultimately have more in common than first apparent if the two characters are read to a degree as doubles (consider Akakii's passion for copying, for instance): "Thus everything in holy Russia is infected with imitation, and each one mimics and apes his superior." Gogol, *Collected Tales* 415.

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enemies who would keep them apart, before exiting the room in utter humiliation. He then espouses a theory on Woman:

> Woman is in love with the devil. Yes, no joking. It's stupid what physicists write, that she's this or that—she loves only the devil. See there, from a box in the first balcony, she's aiming her lorgnette. You think she's looking at that fat one with the star? Not at all, she's looking at the devil standing behind his back. There he is hiding in his tailcoat. There he is beckoning to her with his finger. And she'll marry him. Marry him. And all those high-ranking fathers of theirs, all those who fidget in all directions and worm their way into court and say they're patriots and this and that: income, income is what these patriots want! Mother, father, God—they'll sell them all for money, the ambitious Judases![44]

Piskarev's horror in disappointment is similar when he discovers that the object of his love is depraved. Upon entering her apartment he sees three women, the third of whom is brushing her hair in front of the mirror. But looking around, he sees a dusty mess more typical of a bachelor's room and not in harmony with the woman who had seemed to him to have come straight from a Vannucci painting of the Madonna. Later, after an opium-induced dream, the artist devises to marry the woman who he has realized is a prostitute anyway: "But my deed will be an unmercenary and perhaps even a great one. I'll restore to the world its most beautiful ornament."[45] Just following this thought, he sees himself in the mirror and is frightened by his own pale face. His fate is ultimately as desperate as Poprishchin's call at the end of his diary: "Dear mother, save your poor son! shed a tear on his sick head, see how they torment him! press the poor orphan to your breast! there's no place for him in the world! they're driving him out! Dear mother! pity your sick child!... And did you know that the Dey of Algiers has a bump just under his nose?"[46]

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[44] Gogol, *Collected Tales* 295; *PSS* 3: 209. "Женщина влюблена в чорта. Да, не шутя. Физики пишут глупости, что она то̀ и то̀—она любит только одного чорта. Вон видите, из ложи первого яруса она наводит лорнет. Вы думаете, что она глядит на этого толстяка со звездою? Совсем нет, она глядит на чорта, что у него стоит за спиною. Вон он спрятался к нему в звезду. Вон он кивает оттуда к ней пальцем! И она выйдет за него. Выйдет. А вот эти все, чиновные отцы их, вот эти все, что юлят во все стороны и лезут ко двору, и говорят, что они патриоты, и то и сё: аренды, аренды хотят эти патриоты! Мать, отца, бога, продадут за деньги, честолюбцы, христопродавцы!"

[45] Gogol, *Collected Tales* 264; *PSS* 3: 31 "Но мой подвиг будет бескорыстен и может быть даже великим. Я возвращу миру прекраснейшее его украшение."

[46] Gogol, *Collected Tales* 300; *PSS* 3: 214. "Матушка, спаси твоего бедного сына! урони слезинку на его больную головушку, посмотри, как мучат они его! прижми ко груди своей бедного сиротку! ему нет места на свете! его гонят!—Матушка! пожалей о своем больном дитятке!.. А знаете ли, что у французского короля шишка под самым носом?"

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Considering Gogol''s ultimate fate and his attempts at writing a work that could be redemptive for his nation and his self in part two of *Dead Souls,* it seems he makes a Piskarev-like attempt to give Russian literature an ideal feminine character of both sculpturesque beauty and Christian goodness in the character of Ulin'ka—who, of course, unlike the beautiful prostitute, is incorruptible. Ironically, this creation seems lacking in only the final member of Plato's triad—truth—in that Gogol' was never able to successfully tell her story to completion with the well-known failure of this work.

In *Selected Passages,* Gogol' exhibits a continuing faith in the transformative power of beauty that we have seen in the works from *Arabesques*; in a passage entitled "Woman in the World," he writes, for example: "If already one thoughtless caprice of a beautiful woman has been the reason for the overturning of the world and caused foolishness amongst the most intelligent of people, what would have happened if that caprice were sensible and directed toward good? How much good, then, could a beauty produce compared to other women! This means this tool is powerful."[47] Ulin'ka is just this beauty, reminiscent of the Dikan'ka maidens in her strong willfulness and "caprice," but always standing up for good, a clear Beatrice.

In Ulin'ka's physical description, as relayed upon her first encounter with Chichikov, we have almost a combination of three arts:

> If in a dark room a transparent picture suddenly lit up, illuminated by lamps from behind, it alone would not impress with the suddenness of its appearance, as this figure, presented as if to light up the room… such that if you put them together with her on a painting, all the fashionably dressed ladies would seem like some sort of colourful dolls in market patchwork in front of her. And if you sculpted her in marble with all the enveloping folds of her dress, it would be called a copy of a masterpiece."[48]

Ulin'ka is imagined as a masterful statue, a painting that should humble society, and, first and foremost, as radiating light (clearly reminiscent of an illuminated icon as well). If light may be considered akin to music in its immateriality, then

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[47] Gogol', *PSS* 8: 226. "Если уже один бессмысленный каприз красавицы бывал причиной переворотов всемирных и заставлял делать глупости наиумнейших людей, что же было бы тогда, если бы этот каприз был осмыслен и направлен к добру? Сколько бы добра тогда могла произвести красавица сравнительно перед другими женщинами! Стало быть, это орудие сильное."

[48] Gogol', *PSS* 7: 40–41. "Если бы в темной комнате вдруг вспыхнула прозрачная картина, освещенная сильно сзади лампами, одна она бы так не поразила внезапностью своего явления, как фигурка эта, представшая как бы затем, чтобы осветить комнату… что если бы перенести их вместе с нею на картину, все барышни, одетые по моде, казались бы перед ней какими-то пеструшками, изделием лоскутного ряда. И если бы перенесть ее со всеми этими складками ее обольнувшего платья на мрамор, назвали бы его копиею гениальных."

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perhaps now is the time to return to Gogol''s question: "But if music leaves us, then what will happen to our world?"

The image of Ulin'ka and Gogol''s other hopes for a new, positive vision ultimately evaporated like melancholy echoes from the wedding at Sorochintsy.[49] And with her loss, it seems, based on this study of the mirror motif in Gogol''s works, the closest alternative to the "loveliest ornament" that he offers must be, instead, a return to antiquity as he nostalgically imagined it. As we have seen, the beauties who live apart from the Orthodox world—Paraska and Oksana in their folksy *dvoeverie,* the Polish girl in her Catholicism, and Sculpture in her classicism—can look in the mirror with impunity. The provincial Russians mostly lack the mental acuity to clean the flies off the mirror and seek self-knowledge. Are they the ones to further the sensitive Christian "sister," the art of painting? And when the mirrors are widely available, in the cultured St. Petersburg, the ugly images presented are not recognized or are ignored by the public, but make for the demise of the sincere artist. It seems that in inspecting Gogol' "through the looking glass" we also find an increasing sense of emptiness, confusion and desperation; the cleaner the mirror the more acutely it reflects the dirt.

[49] Mikhail Epstein writes: "Gogol's aesthetic negates that which he himself tried to assert as a moralist and a patriot, that on which he built his life's credo and his mission as a preacher." Cf. Mikhail Epstein, "The Irony of Style: The Demonic Element in Gogol's Concept of Russia," translated by Jonathan Z. Ludwig and Sven Spieker, in *Gogol—Exploring Absence: Negativity in 19th Century Russian Literature,* edited by Sven Spieker (Bloomington: Slavica, 1999) 71. The scholar also cites Annenskii's prior work on the subject.

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